DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 355 556 CS 213 762

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TITLE Characteristics of Student Performance as Factors in Portfolio Assessment. Report Series 3.8.
INSTITUTION National Research Center on Literature Teaching and Learning, Albany, NY.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 93
CONTRACT R117G10015
NOTE 21p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Teaching Guides (For Teacher) (052) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Learning Processes; Literature; *Portfolios (Background Materials); Secondary Education; Secondary School Students; Student Characteristics; *Student Evaluation; *Student Improvement; Teacher Student Relationship; Writing Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS *Alternative Assessment

ABSTRACT

Portfolio assessment can be different in kind from traditional assessment measures: it can provide a fuller picture of the learner; it can be much more than an expanded grade book; but the criteria and language for evaluating and describing the portfolio must be different from those used for evaluating individual products. To describe the fuller picture of habitual performance that is the function of portfolios, it is useful to consider five factors: range, flexibility, connections, conventions, and independence. The concept of range includes the dimensions of breadth and depth and can only be assessed through multiple observations. Flexibility refers to how students read, write, and perform. The ability to make connections is the single most important factor in assessing the language competence of an individual. The concept of conventions is integral to the ability to make connections. Independence is a problematic term in the present context of educational discussion. Questions asked by teachers in reviewing portfolios for evidence of student progress should be raised with students during conferences and not used as a checklist to identify deficiencies. (Contains 20 references.) (RS)

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Characteristics of Student Performance as Factors in Portfolio Assessment

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Report Series 3.8

1993

Preparation of this report was supported under the Educational Research and Development Center Program (Grant number R117G10015) as administered by the Office of Research, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education. The findings and opinions expressed here do not neccessarily reflect the position or policies of the sponsoring agency.

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Characteristics of Student Performance as Factors in Portfolio Assessment

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In this paper I want to make the case that portfolio assessment can be different in kind from traditional assessment measures. It can provide a fuller picture of the learner. It can be much more than an expanded grade book. But, if that is to be the case, the criteria and language for evaluating and describing the portfolio must be different from those used for evaluating individual products.

In 1970 James Moffett wrote:

> The only hope for truth through observation is to synthesize the totality of observations - from different times and vantage points into a full picture. This certainly must include the student's statements about what he has or has not learned, how and when. The interior and external views correct and corroborate each other. Discrepancies stimulate new insights. (p. 113)

Moffet's call for assessment of student performance through observation over time and in diverse conditions is reflected today in the interest in portfolios as an assessment tool. Not only do portfolios offer the advantages of providing evidence of longitudinal development and consistency of performance in changing conditions, but portfolio assessment also adds the advantage of being unobstrusive, making evaluation an "episode of learning" (Wolf, 1991) rather than "asking either teachers or students to engage in other activities merely or principally for the sake of evaluation" (Moffett, 1970).

There can be little doubt that portfolios allow educators to capture a fuller picture than is available from traditional methods of assessment, but the question that arises is whether that fuller picture is actually communicated in the assessment. Does assessment of the portfolio rely on application of the same criteria that are used for assessment of separate instances of student performance? In some models of portfolio use that are presently available, traditional criteria for evaluating student writing are applied to each piece included in the portfolio and an arithmetic average is computed to attain a grade for the portfolio. In other models student and teacher narratives assessing the pieces in the portfolio are included as part of the portfolio itself and the grade that is assigned to the portfolio is negotiated between the teacher and student based on agreed upon criteria. In either case a grade results from analysis of the individual products included in the portfolio. Such use of the portfolio raises the question of whether the portfolio

is anything more than an expanded gradebook? And, if it is not, could it be?

I see the process of assessing the portfolio as a whole, rather than as a collection and ranking of several best pieces, as an example of the "trigonometric" measurement described by Purves, a form of measurement that seeks to infer from an analysis of the work to the mental processes of the student (Purves, 1970). In reviewing a portfolio our goal is not to mark and grade individual products but to appraise the whole set as indicators of where the student is as a learner and thinker. I see the difference between grading individual samples of student work and evaluating the portfolio as similar to the difference between finding language and criteria to describe a baseball player's excellent performance in his best games and those one would use to make the case that he is an outstanding player who should be included in the Hall of Fame. To describe the fuller picture of habitual performance that is the function of portfolios, it is useful to consider five factors: range, flexibility, connections, conventions, and independence. These factors are useful in describing and evaluating performance of any type, but each takes on particular meaning as an indicator of language proficiency and literary understanding and appreciation.

This discussion of these factors of performance as they relate to the study of literature is based on some assumptions:

1. The object of literature study is neither texts nor readers but the "trans-action" between the reader and the text in which the "poem" (literary work of art) is recreated (Rosenblatt, 1978).
2. The domain of literature study includes three interrelated aspects: cultural knowledge, practice, and preferences or habits (Purves, 1989).
3. In the study of literature, students demonstrate learning through oral and written exhibitions in all the traditional modes: expressive, poetic, and transactional (Britton, 1970).

Recognizing these assumptions may help to explain why certain considerations are included in the analysis of these factors rather than others that might be equally important from another perspective.

At the end of the sections that follow is a list of questions to illustrate how teachers might apply the theoretical understanding of each factor to the analysis of the student portfolio. The questions are meant to suggest a framework for describing what the student is able to do in the study of literature. The questions are <u>not</u> meant to provide a checklist of elements that must be included.

Range

The concept of range includes the dimensions of breadth and depth and can only be assessed through multiple observations. In the area of language ability in general, range applies to a huge number of dimensions over which the individual must demonstrate control, such as:

subjects, topics, themes, registers, levels of usage, levels of diction, grammatical forms, rhetorical forms, stylistics, discourse, and conventions. In literature study, additional elements are required: grammars of the genres, interpretive strategies, critical and cultural criteria from which to analyze and evaluate a text, and the range of the literary texts themselves. How many poems can you read? Have you read? How about novels? Short stories? Dramas? Literary essays? How diverse are all of those in terms of form, complexity, subject matter, themes, cultural origin, and ideology. One of the features that distinguishes the high achieving student from less successful peers in the eyes of educators is the breadth of the individual's reading. When the reading is deep as well as broad, the reader is considered to be exceptionally proficient.

One very significant feature of assessment of student performance in the area of literature and language is the valuing of a range that is both broad and deep. Such a value reflects a concern that students use language to explore widely and to expand their reservoir of literary and life experiences. This prejudice in favor of a broad and deep range distinguishes the standard for student performance from the adult professional standard by which performance is generally measured. In reality, adult professionals often specialize and limit their range to one that is narrow but deep. Rather than being seen as a limitation, such specialization is expected and celebrated in professional scholars and writers of literature. We do not, for example, bemoan the fact that Emily Dickinson wrote no novels or that Henry James wrote no poems. Nor do we wish that Joyce had tried his hand at naturalist fiction or that Flannery O'Connor had left us some romances. Rather, we celebrate the fact that these geniuses each took a form of literature that was sympathetic to their nature and brought it to a new standard of excellence. Similarly, we may have more confidence in literary scholars who have specialized in one author or period or school of criticism as opposed those who are generalists.

The opposite condition applies when we appraise the performance of developing learners. In that case, the preference is for wide ranging exploration with some depth in chosen areas. In *Embracing Contraries*, Peter Elbow defines "real learning " as "the ability to apply already-learned concepts to the widest range of data" combined with the "ability to construct new concepts" (p.12).

The ability to experience real learning as Elbow describes it requires that the student be provided with wide ranging opportunities for making meaning. One fundamental indicator of the individual's range in literature study might be the ability to read from different stances. Louise Rosenblatt makes the distinction between reading from an aesthetic stance (for the "lived through" literary experience) and from an efferent stance (to attain information necessary to get something done). Teachers of students at the upper elementary level (grades 3 - 6) often report that students who can read and enjoy stories experience difficulty in school when the program begins to demand more reading for information. Even some experienced readers are not equally adept at reading from each of these stances and may not even recognize that there are different stances, each requiring distinct strategies. As Rosenblatt points out any text can be "the occasion for *either* a 'literary' *or* a 'nonliterary' reading" (1991). The distinguishing factor is the nature of the experience or transaction between the reader and text, not the nature of the text itself. Therefore, in describing the range of the individual we might first determine whether there is evidence of truly aesthetic experiences or whether the literature is read from an efferent stance

much as one reads expository texts.

One factor that limits the aesthetic experience of literature in classroom study is the nature of the writing that is commonly required (Rosenblatt, 1978, Applebee, 1978). Analytic essays of the type commonly found in literature classes that discuss the form of a piece of literature or its origin or social relevance give evidence of an efferent reading of that literature. For evidence of an aesthetic reading of the text, we need to see indications in the student's written or oral response of the "lived through experience," the private associations, and the affective responses. Journal entries, of course, are likely vehicles for aesthetic response to literature, but aesthetic responses to literature can also take the form of writing (or oral presentation) that is more formal in nature and more public in intent. Louise Rosenblatt devotes a great deal of attention in *The Reader, the Text, the Poem* to the variety of interpretive and critical responses that constitute aesthetic responses to texts. She argues:

> The term "literary critic" should be reserved for one whose primary subject is his aesthetic transaction with the text; he reflects on the work of art that he has evoked. . . . In the basic paradigm for literary criticism, then the movement is from an intensely realized aesthetic transaction with a text to reflection on semantic or technical or other details in order to return to, and correlate with them, that particular personally apprehended aesthetic reading (p. 162).

The ability to read from both efferent and aesthetic stances is a fundamental indication of an individual's range as a reader of literature. Another essential is the ability to read in a variety of genres. Accomplished readers can read with authority in many genres, such as: novels, short stories, poems, dramas, literary essays, and biographies and can articulate a response appropriate to the particular conventions of the genre. Those readers' responses to a particular poem will indicate not only that they are able to make connections between the poem and their own experience but also between this poem and other poems of its type and of the body of poetry as a whole (Frye, p.96). As we will see in the discussion of conventions, some understanding of the genre is essential to a successful literary transaction. As Suzanne Langer observes, "The recognition of structure gives the mind its ability to find meanings" (p.132).

A third essential indicator of a reader's range is the variety of subject matter read in terms of topics, disciplines, and themes. Every teacher can tell of students whose reading is limited to particular areas of individual interest. Whether this limited preference reflects a social or personal interest (e.g., fishing, sports, romances) or an academic focus (e.g., physics, political science), a narrow focus is considered less undesirable in students. We value for developing minds the experience of grappling with the widest ranging topics and ideas in order to find their own perspectives on them. We also look for evidence of complexity and sophistication in the treatments of the topics. The student who reads *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* may be considered by his teacher to be a more accomplished reader than the one who reads *Rumblefish* even though both books were chosen because of the reader's interest in the topic of motorcycle riding. [An aside: This preference for having students read widely should not be confused with a desire to "cover" enormous quantities of literature for the sake of achieving something called "cultural literacy." It is reasonable to expect that the student who reads widely in literature on

many topics will become literate in many areas, but a superficial knowledge of information on a great number of topics is not the goal.]

Other indicators of range are also important. Today we particularly value reading literature of diverse cultures. While most educators still encourage reading literature from the traditional canon, they also want their students to read the rich literature from cultures other than their own. The ability to appreciate literature from diverse cultures, to recognize the commonalities while respecting the differences and to view life from the perspective of another set of cultural values, is a mark of and contribution toward students' increasing sophistication. Some questions teachers might ask in reviewing students' portfolios for evidence of this range of literary experience are:

- Is there evidence of a wide range of topics and subject matter in the literature included? Of a range of genres and forms?
- Is there evidence of students' willingness to undertake rewarding transactions with increasingly demanding texts?
- Are there both efferent and aesthetic readings of texts?
- Are responses written or performed in different modes: expressive, transactional, and poetic?
- Do the literary works come from diverse cultures?

Flexibility

Range is an indication of the scope of students' literary experiences; it identifies "what" literature students read and what they write and perform. Flexibility, on the other hand, refers to "how" students read, write, and perform. Flexibility is an important feature of portfolio assessment in that it is the factor that distinguishes the "habitual performance" that is observable in the portfolio from those individual examples of literary experiences typically recorded in grade books. Flexibility distinguishes portfolio assessment from assessment based on behavioral objectives. Whereas behavioral objectives attempt to describe performance in certain prescribed conditions, the portfolio is an attempt to give evidence of performance in varied and changing conditions. In her explanation of the transactional theory of literary experience, Rosenblatt posits three elements in the transaction: the reader, the text, and the context. Flexibility allows the reader to transact with a text in a variety of contexts, in each transaction re-creating a different poem.

Like range, flexibility is reflected in the portfolio in a variety of ways. One way is the situation referred to above in which the individual's readings of the same text in different contexts results in the re-creation of different poems. Robert Probst maintains that in a response-based classroom "students may come to see the importance of context in any reading. . . . They may see that the circumstances in which the text is encountered may shape reactions to it" (p. 26). In a lecture at State University of New York at Albany, John Gerber, whose article "Varied Approaches to 'When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd'" (1970) is a model of flexibility in reading literature, tells the story of an experience he had reading "When Lilacs Last

in the Dooryard Bloom'd" with a college English class in November 1963. Having begun the reading on Friday, November 22nd, the class reconvened the following week to discover that Whitman's poem on the death of Lincoln had rich and immediate meaning for them as they struggled to make sense of the death of John Kennedy. Gerber points out that the poem had particular meaning not only for the students who read the poem for the first time against the background of Kennedy's assassination, but also for Gerber himself who had read and written about the poem for years but for whom it became in that reading a new work of art.

Not all contexts are as dramatic a setting for reading a work of literature as the presidential assassination was in Gerber's anecdote, but each new context produces a slightly different poem for the astute reader. Classroom activities that ask students to revisit a familiar work and to respond to it from the perspective of another text or to read a piece of literature particularly for its relevance to an immediate social situation test the flexibility of readers who must change the focus of their attention as they transact with the text in that particular context. Written responses to the same text produced at different times and in different contexts indicate the individual's flexibility in putting aside previous readings to see it in a new way.

Related to the ability to read texts in varying contexts is the ability of readers to read texts from a variety of critical perspectives. Many teachers of literature today, especially those who have participated in the National Writing Project, see value in student readers learning to read from a range of critical and cultural perspectives. This practice recognizes that any critical reading of a text involves a negotiation between at least two codes: the author's and the reader's. Of course every reader has a whole repertory of internalized codes from which to read. The experienced and skillful reader is able to select purposefully from the repertory one or another code to apply in the critical reading of the text and to read the text from the vantage point of the values and criteria of that cultural code. Teachers who see critical flexibility as a value for their student readers will leave students free to select the critical or cultural perspective from which to read a particular work. They consider it a mark of sophistication for the student to select a code that yields a particularly rich analysis of a work, and they also value the ability to view the same work from a number of distinctive codes. Tolerance of the ambiguity that results from reading from a number of perspectives is a significant indication of a reader's sophistication.

Flexibility is also evident in the portfolio in the ability students demonstrate in fitting their language, style, form, and message to the intended audience as well as to the topic, purpose, and context. A literature portfolio may well contain pieces in every mode: expressive, poetic, and transactional (Britton, 1970) and from both aesthetic and efferent stances (Rosenblatt, ?). There should be texts within texts (readings), texts upon texts (interpretations), and texts against texts (criticisms) (Scholes, 1985). There is the highly personalized language of journals and reading logs that may ignore the conventions of standard usage; there is the highly charged language of poetic expression whose sounds, shapes, and rhythms are as significant as its meaning; there is the analytic language of the critical essay or research paper whose clarity and logic convince readers of the right thinking of the writer; there may be parodies of the writing of famous authors that demonstrate the perceptiveness of the reader/parodist. When the form, mode, language, and style of each of the diverse pieces in the portfolio seem right for the purpose, audience, and context, we can determine that the individual demonstrates exemplary

flexibility.

Some questions to consider in assessing the portfolio for evidence of flexibility:

- Do the responses to literary texts contain evidence of the context in which the reading took place: discussion of how and why the particular work was chosen, indications of the demands of the particular assignment, references to world events or personal circumstances occurring at the time of the reading, and/or comparisons with other literature?
- Is there evidence of a repertoire of critical and cultural approaches? Of a purposeful selection from that repertoire?
- Are there multiple readings of some texts from a variety of critical or cultural perspectives?
- Is there evidence of the students' conscious choice of a particular mode of writing that seems suitable to their response?
- Do the diction, voice, level of usage, and selection of evidence, vary purposefully across the pieces depending on the genre, purpose, audience, and context?

Connections

Perhaps the single most important factor in assessing the language competence of an individual is the ability to make connections. All meaning making rests on the ability to make connections between what is newly encountered and what was previously known. Fundamental to Reader Response theory is the assumption that the "poem" (that is, the literary work of art) is "an event in time" that happens when the "reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality" (Rosenblatt, p. 12). The ability to draw productively from the repertoire of past experiences and to make creative and insightful connections in order to interpret a difficult text distinguishes the sophisticated reader. Clearly the ability to make connections is related to the range of the individual's knowledge and experience, but even individuals with vast experience and knowledge can differ in their ability to make connections among the diverse elements of their prior knowledge.

The two aspects of "real learning" described by Elbow are components of what I am here calling an ability to make connections. The first of those aspects, "the ability to apply already learned concepts to the widest range of data," relies, as Elbow explains it, on the interpenetration of formally-learned and experientially-learned concepts, what Vygotsky called "scientific concepts" and "spontaneous concepts" (Elbow, p. 18). Students whose responses to literature are full of insights are drawing on their ability to see in the literature instances either of the concepts they have acquired from their formal study (e.g., literary concepts such as irony, tragedy, foreshadowing, allegory) or of the concepts they have acquired through experience (e.g., family loyalty, loneliness, grief) or a combination of the two. In Vygotsky's view the interpenetration of these two types of concepts allows the individual to recognize formally-learned (scientific) concepts in real situations and to explain experientially-learned (spontaneous) concepts in formal language. It is this interpenetration that enables an individual to apply scientific and spontaneous

concepts in the literary transaction.

The second of the aspects of "real learning," the ability to invent new concepts or to think with metaphors, is essential to the articulation of a literary response or interpretation. Wolfgang Iser describes the reading process as one that requires the creative participation of the reader. He writes:

> Even in the simplest story there is bound to be some kind of blockage, if only because no tale can ever be told in its entirety. Indeed, it is only through inevitable omissions that a story gains its dynamism. Thus whenever the flow is interrupted and we are led off in unexpected directions, the opportunity is given to us to bring into play our own faculty for establishing connections--for filling the gaps left by the text itself (p. 55).

Sometimes the gaps will be filled in by the reader through the application of a known concept as described, but at other times the literary response is more creative, relying on the reader's ability to think with metaphors:

> Two people gazing at the night sky may both be looking at the same collection of stars, but one will see the image of a plough, and the other will make out a dipper. The "stars" in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable. The author of the text may, of course, exert plenty of influence on the reader's imagination--he has the whole panoply of narrative techniques at his disposal--but no author worth his salt will ever attempt to set the *whole* picture before his reader's eyes. If he does, he will very quickly lose his reader, for it is only by activating the reader's imagination that the author can hope to involve him and so realize the intentions of his text (p. 57).

Readings of texts are as individual as the texts themselves and particularly effective readings of literary works are often those that make conscious use of metaphor to resymbolize the text. By that I do not mean that those literary responses are themselves poetic discourse (although they might be), but that even responses written in the expressive or transactional modes often make use of metaphors to express insights.

The ability to make connections through the application of already learned concepts and through thinking in metaphors manifests itself in many ways. John Mayher discusses the importance of "intertextuality," calling it "one of the key ingredients in developing the capacity to make more mature and sophisticated transactions." In Mayher's view, "We are always in the process of becoming good readers since every new text can at least potentially enrich and extend our competence as readers" (Mayher, p. 216). Mayher analyzes the ability to make connections and its reliance on intertextuality this way:

> Clearly, the sophistication of response can and should be deepening throughout the school years. This depends on a variety of factors including each learner's growing experience of the world--hence the more connections which can potentially be

> made to the people and events one is reading about--and the growing repertoire of other texts which have been read which, themselves, enable connections to be made. . . . One does not have to be a deconstructionist to recognize that through reading (and being read to), readers have internalized a repertoire of textual conventions and genres, as well as characters and plots, and that this kind of cultural literacy plays a role in our transactions with all texts (p. 220).

Robert Scholes explains the necessity of making connections in the process of reading, interpreting, and criticizing literature as a matter of recovering essential codes. He writes:

> Reading is possible only to the extent that the actual reader shares a semantic and syntactic field with the writer. A "field" in this sense is a set of codes and paradigms that enable and constrain meaning. The further estranged the reader is from the writer (by time, space, language, or temperament) the more interpretation must be called upon to provide a conscious construction of unavailable or faded codes and paradigms. If we are going to read John Donne, for example, we must recover something of the codes of alchemy, Neoplatonism, Petrarchan erotics, early Anglican theology, and a feeling for the syntax and semantics of a spoken and written English vastly different from our own (p. 48).

Scholes theory of textuality may seem far removed from the daily concerns of high school literature teachers, and yet every teacher has experienced the frustration of trying to teach literature of remote cultural contexts to students who have few apparent connections with the historical traditions of those cultures. A great deal of class time is spent with the teacher explaining unfamiliar terms and references to the students in order to make a text accessible to them. Students who have experienced the process of recovering "faded codes" with a teacher over a number of years will display in their own responses to literature an awareness of the tension between their own familiar codes and those of an author removed in time or place and will demonstrate an ablilty to recover for herself the codes necessary for a satisfying reading of the work.

Rosenblatt explains the process by which a reader develops a "framework" for negotiating this interplay between the codes of the author and those of the reader as one which relies on both memory and curiosity as the reader almost automatically moves "through a continuing flow of responses, syntheses, readjustment, and assimilation" (Rosenblatt, p. 58). Some readers will find frameworks that yield rich readings of the work that take into account all the aspects of the text in the "recreation" of the poem, but others will be limited in their ability to assimilate all the details of the text because of limitations in their previous experience of the language or referents of the text and will produce readings that are naive, superficial, or even invalid. Bartholomae and Petrosky have pointed out that any reading is a reduction of a text, but teachers are aware that not all readings are equal and that they need some criteria for distinguishing the quality of readings in the absence of an "ideal" or "correct" reading. Rosenblatt suggests the criterion of "the fullness and intensity of the reader's sense of his evocation, testing it not only by the fidelity to cues offered by the text but also by the complexity of the strands of awareness woven into a coherent structure" (p. 154). Rosenblatt's criterion adds to the idea of the reader's ability to make

connections ("to cues offered by the text") the notion of the appropriateness and efficacy of those connections (to produce "a coherent structure").

A constant question of teachers is how to judge the relative quality of the literary responses of their students. The theories of Rosenblatt, Scholes, Iser, Vygotsky, Elbow, and others provide teachers with frameworks for analyzing the ability of students to make wide ranging and insightful connections in their literary transactions. In considering the evidence of students' ability to make connections, the teacher might ask several questions based on the contributions of these literary theorists:

- What evidence is there in the portfolio of the application of formally-learned concepts and experientially-learned concepts in the literary transactions?
- How successfully do students use metaphor to resymbolize texts?
- Are there indications across the pieces in the portfolio of students' ability to make connections among texts (awareness of common themes, similar characters or plots, conventional forms or structures)?
- Do the students display strategies for "recovering unfamiliar codes" and for exploring the tension between their own codes and those of the author and text?
- Are the pieces in the portfolio rich personal transactions with literary texts that capture "the fullness and intensity of the reader's sense of his evocation" rather than paraphrases or summaries of "received" readings?

Conventions

As the previous section indicates, the concept of conventions is integral to the ability to make connections. In their discussions of connections, Mayher, Scholes, Rosenblatt and Elbow all refer to the repertoire of conventions that the individual possesses. Students' control of a wide range of conventions is readily recognized by teachers as essential to the academic study of literature, even though those conventions usually operate below the level of consciousness (Applebee, 1978). However, all too often discussion of "conventions" with reference to students' academic work is limited to the narrow range of surface level conventions, such as grammar, usage, diction, punctuation, and spelling. But in the assessment of portfolios a much broader view of conventions is necessary to describe fully all that the student is able to do. This view includes all the rhetorical and pragmatic conventions necessary for reading as well as speaking and writing about literature. Purves (1987) argues that the liberation found in being literate "occurs only subsequent to the mastery and acceptance of conventions and the acquisition of a body of knowledge" (Purves, 1987). For the purpose of assessing student achievement in the study of literature, teachers may consider three general categories of conventions: literary conventions essential to poetic expression and reception, discourse conventions appropriate to the range of writing and oral performance expected of literature students, and the surface level "mechanical" conventions of particular concern in elementary and secondary education.

Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* describes in detail the importance of conventions to literary criticism and production. "The problem of convention," Frye says, "is the problem of

how art can be communicable, for literature is clearly as much a technique of communication as assertive verbal structures are" (p. 99). Conventions in Frye's view include all those "expected associations" that the poet uses to "communicate more rapidly." All poetic writing, according to Frye, falls somewhere on a continuum between "pure convention" where a writer uses a traditional image or formal device merely because it has been used previously in the same way to the "anti-conventional" or experimental writing that purposely tries to break with convention. Regardless of where the work falls on the continuum, an understanding of the conventions that are being followed or violated is essential for a satisfying experience of the text. Among the conventions referred to by Frye are conventions of imagery, of characterization and plot, and of form.

One implication of Frye's recognition of the importance of conventions is the value of "highly conventionalized literature" for classroom study. Many teachers have discovered for themselves the usefulness of fairy tales, folk tales, popular music, and films for introducing their students to archetypal patterns and images. Students who first discover conventional patterns in more familiar literature gradually become able to apply those patterns in reading and interpreting more complex and demanding works. Students' portfolios will contain evidence of their ability to use the conventions of poetic writing in the production of literary pieces of their own creation as well as evidence of the ability to recognize the conventions and their effect in the piece in students' responses to and analyses of literature.

Just as there are conventions particular to poetic writing, there are also conventions for transactional writing of all types. Students work in the portfolio should give evidence of their control of the discourse conventions appropriate to the variety of speaking and writing forms that they will use in the study of literature. An important ability for students is the ability to use the conventions of academic discourse in the production of those forms of transactional writing commonly expected in literature study, such as critical essays, reviews, research reports, summaries, and precis. We should not underestimate the complexity of this expectation for students. Language appropriate for academic investigation is very far removed from the vernacular of many students. Shirley Brice Heath's studies have shown the advantage students have when the language of the home approximates the language valued in school. Bartholomae and Petrosky in *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* point out that students who are less successful in formal academic study often lack the authority over academic discourse that more successful students have. The problem is compounded when we recognize that there is not just one discourse required of students in their academic study, but each discipline has its own discourse with distinct conventions. Purves points out that in the course of a day or week "students must be apprenticed to five or six rhetorical communities" (1987).

In an article in *College English*, Peter Elbow (1991) discusses the need for students to learn the conventions of academic discourse and the difficulty of determining what characterizes that discourse and how to accommodate the need of students to learn those conventions without sacrificing what is really valuable in writing instruction. The conventions of academic discourse are, in Elbow's view, problematic. Elbow maintains that what distinguishes academic discourse is not "the intellectual stance," or "deep structure," but "certain stylistic or mechanical conventions." Acknowledging that there are recognizable common features of generic academic style, Elbow goes on to investigate the "problematic intellectual and social implications" that attend

those conventions. He concludes that teachers should avoid teaching any "currrently privileged set of stylistic conventions of academic discourse" but that they should devote time to the larger exploration of various voices and styles that are appropriate to communicating with various live audiences. When students are engaged in the demanding intellectual tasks of giving reasons and evidence to think through problems of genuine interest, they will develop the conventions of voice, register, tone, diction, syntax, and mannerisms that will be effective with their audiences.

A consideration of literary conventions and the conventions of academic and nonacademic discourse appropriate to the study of literature reminds us of the huge scope of this concept of conventions as an indicator of the performance of a student in the literature class. At the same time, we do not want to overlook the narrower view of conventions that teachers commonly associate with the assessment of student language performance is also an important indicator of students' achievement. Considerations of grammar, usage, spelling, and punctuation do count in the academic world and teachers do a disservice to their students if they ignore these elements just as they do if they over-emphasize them. The portfolio, however, may not be the place for assessing mastery of these mechanics since presumably the work included in the portfolio has been through all stages of the writing process. Therefore, pieces included in the portfolio (except for pieces of personal expressive writing) should give evidence of students' ability to edit and proofread their own work and to produce a finished product (whether poetic or transactional) that is free of surface errors.

In assessing the portfolio for evidence of knowledge and control of conventions, the teacher might ask:

- Do the responses to literary works indicate an awareness of the conventions of the genres and periods of the works?
- Does the poetic writing in the portfolio show an awareness, whether through use or inversion, of the conventions of that genre?
- Do the transactional pieces (e.g., essays, research reports, theses) reflect conventions appropriate to the genre, purpose, and audience?
- Have the pieces in the portfolio been edited to eliminate surface errors?

Independence

Independence is a problematic term in the present context of educational discussion. For many people the term suggests the individual's ability to perform without consultation or collaboration of any type. The perennial concern of teachers in grading written assignments is determining that the work that is handed in is really the student's "own work." While many teachers have moved away from the view that the only valid indicator of students' ability is work produced without intervention or assistance of any kind to a recognition that human endeavor is usually collaborative and social, there is still a concern for determining how much personal control and responsibility students demonstrates in their own learning.

The question of "cheating," of submitting someone else's work as one's own, is less an issue

in a classroom that is centered around the reading and writing processes of the students than it was in traditional classrooms because reading, responding, discussing, and writing about literature are the essential components of classroom activities, and the teacher is constantly observing students' performances in each of those activities. Teachers' assessments of students' learning is a continuous process of observing what the students are trying to do, what resources they call on in order to accomplish that, and how successful they are in accomplishing their own purposes. Portfolios can be enormously helpful in this process. Dennie Palmer Wolf has described the use of "process-portfolios" as a means of making assessment an occasion for learning, learning not only the subject matter of the class but also the standards for judging ones own performance and "ways of questioning and improving the quality of their work" (p.59). Wolf describes the ways in which process portfolios differ from familiar portfolios:

> The generation of these process-folios is embedded in a much larger classroom context where teachers and students frequently discuss what goes into creating worthwhile work, what makes for helpful critique, and how to plow comments back into ongoing work. In addition to finished works, these collections contain sample "biographies of work"--documentation of the various stages of a project. When collected at diverse points, these biographies permit a longitudinal look at a student's changing control of the processes for shaping a final piece. Students often keep journals and write reflections about their work. Finally, the collections of work students build are anything but archival. They regularly return to earlier works to revise or make comparisons with later ones. At the close of the year, students reenter their collections to make a final selection of biographies, reflections, and final pieces that can serve as the basis for a course grade and/or part of a permanent record of their development (p.58).

Clearly the process Wolf describes is far different from the traditional practice of assigning a piece to be handed in at a specified date and determining a grade based on the quality of the piece that is handed in. In the "portfolio culture," independence takes on a different meaning from what it had in the traditional classroom. Rather than meaning an absence of reliance on outside resources, in this context independence includes in its meaning the notions of responsibility, resourcefulness, and authority. Seen from this perspective, independence is a positive indicator of increasing capability rather than an indicator of a lack of reliance on something or someone else. This view moves us out of the deficit model of assessment that takes each piece of evidence of a student's use of outside help as a mark of inadequacy and in its place uses the same evidence to determine how successful the student is in making use of available resources to help in the process of finding and expressing meaning.

Related to the notion of independence is the question of plagiarism, a constant factor in academic investigation. How do we develop in students the ability to make use of the published ideas of others in ways that are legitimate and supportive? Ann Berthoff (1981) recommends the double-entry notebook in which the student transcribes sections from their reading on one side of the page and annotates them on the other (e.g., writing summaries, comparisons, questions, arguments). The effect of the notebook is that students are forced to think about the material transcribed and its relationship to their own developing meaning so that the ideas or even the

passages themselves find their way into students' own writing (simply) as examples, support, or counterarguments. As teachers monitor the composing process, they are aware of how well students are "progressing in learning to think critically, to see relationships methodically, to discover and develop meanings" (Berthoff, p. 122), and if necessary, teachers can intervene to help that progress.

The final point to be made about independence is that the portfolio assembled by high school students will almost always be made up of work accomplished with a great amount of teacher and peer assistance. Following Vygotsky's principle that "instruction is only useful when it moves ahead of development," teachers design classroom experiences that allow students "to do in collaboration today [what they] will be able to do independently tomorrow" (Vygotsky, p. 211). Therefore the works included in the portfolio are often the first, or nearly the first, of their kind produced by the student. Even in the cases where the pieces are similar in form to ones that the student has been producing for a considerable time, the teacher expects that in some way the piece will represent a new level of challenge or accomplishment for that student. It would be an ineffective use of school time for students to produce for the portfolio examples of work that already are within their mature functioning. Therefore, even in the case of samples of writing or oral performance that are in forms long included within students' repertoire, the teacher will look for evidence of growth in range and complexity.

These questions might be asked by the teacher in reviewing the portfolio for evidence of growing independence:

- To what extent are students' own views, imagination, language, and style dominant in the portfolio?
- What evidence is there of students' abilities to use other resources to accomplish their purposes?
- How effectively do students synthesize material from other sources to support or illustrate their own thinking?
- What do students reflections on the pieces in the portfolio indicate about their understanding and control of their own learning?

The question still remains how to make use of the information that is available from such an analysis of the student portfolio based on these performance factors. I started out by cautioning that the questions should not be used as a checklist for the purpose of identifying deficiencies. They might however be used when teachers and students have portfolio conferences. Recalling Moffett's suggestion that a comparison of a student's and a teacher's views about what that student has learned will result in "discrepancies [that] stimulate new insights," we might argue that the mere discussion of these factors is the most valuable type of assessment.

In those situations where a more conventional report of student progress is required, the discussion of the portfolio might result in a grid of the factors with an indicator of the strength of each of those factors (from weak to strong or from acceptable to excellent or from A to F). The difference between such a grid and the traditional grade (or grade book) is that the

performance indicators on the grid refer to the overall performance of the student as a learner and thinker as reflected in the portfolio contents. They are not evaluations of the individual pieces of work.

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